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"Slide down the corner of the duvet!" he said. "Come on, it's quite easy!"

This wasn't true; however, Jack did his best, and after a frightening descent, which involved a big drop to the floor at the bottom, he finally landed beside the Christmas Pig. They were now exactly the same size: eight inches tall.

"Well, goodbye, everybody," said the Christmas Pig and he began to march toward Jack's bedroom door. "Nice meeting you."

Some of the Things in the bedroom tried to call them back.

"Think!" said a little plastic shark that Jack had bought at the Sea-Life Center, flapping its fins on the floor. "Think about what you're doing, Pig!"

"I have thought, thank you," said the Christmas Pig, leaning against the bottom of the door, which bounced open.

"No living child has ever entered the Land of the Lost!" wept a little robot Jack had once gotten free with a burger, and which he'd earlier thrown at the wall.

"There's a first time for everything," said the Christmas Pig as he and Jack walked out onto the landing.

"Jack, he's not telling you the—" began a pair of pants that had fallen out of one of Jack's drawers, but the Christmas Pig had placed his trotters beneath the door, where there was an inch of space, and tugged it shut again.

"Very boring Things you have," he told Jack. "Come on."

Thinking how rude the Christmas Pig was, and that he and Holly deserved each other, Jack followed the pig to the top of the stairs and copied him as he began lowering himself off each step onto the next. The bannisters were as tall as skyscrapers now that Jack was so small.

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They cast frightening shadows across the boy and the pig as they descended.

"Why aren't the stairs talking?" Jack asked, as he dropped from one to the next. "Why didn't my duvet?"

"Some Things aren't awake enough to talk, even on Christmas Eve," said the Christmas Pig. "Is your duvet new?"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Then it won't have had many of your feelings put into it yet. That's what wakes Things up. Being used and absorbing human feelings. Things like stairs and walls are taken for granted by humans, so they hardly ever get wakened."

"But *you're* new," said Jack. "And you're very awake."

A bit *too* awake, Jack thought privately, but he didn't say that out loud.

"I'm a special case," said the Christmas Pig and Jack thought this sounded boastful, and not at all the kind of comment DP would make, because DP never showed off.

"Now we need to decide where the best place to get lost is," said the Christmas Pig. "It's harder than you might think when you're trying to do it on purpose. Any ideas?"

"Is that all we have to do to get there?" asked Jack. "Get lost?"

"Of course, but it'll be hard, because I expect you know this house very well."

"It might be easier in the garden," said Jack. "Especially now I'm small. We could drag a chair to the back door, climb up to the lock, and open it."

"Good idea," said the Christmas Pig. They'd just reached the bottom of the stairs. "Which way?"

Jack led the Christmas Pig down the dark hallway toward the kitchen. The hall seemed vast when you were only eight inches tall. One good thing was the big gap beneath the door into the kitchen. He and the Christmas Pig got down on their bellies and wriggled through.

“Excellent,” said the Christmas Pig. “Now if we can just push the chair over to—”

But he never finished the sentence. A gigantic four-legged beast had risen up in front of them: a monster with long yellow teeth, shaggy fur, and gleaming eyes. With a deep bark, the monster launched itself at the Christmas Pig, skidding on the linoleum and almost catching the pig between its dangerous jaws.

“Run, run!” cried the Christmas Pig, sprinting back toward the door. Jack followed, Toby-the-dog’s smelly breath hot on the back of his neck, his claws scrabbling on the floor. Together, Jack and the Christmas Pig threw themselves onto their tummies and dived back under the door, into the hall.

"You should have said there was a dog!" panted the Christmas Pig as he and Jack lay there, catching their breath.

"I forgot!" said Jack. "He doesn't usually live here!"

Toby-the-dog was whining and scratching on the kitchen side of the door, trying to reach them.

"It'll have to be the front door instead," said the Christmas Pig, picking himself up and dusting himself off. "Come on."

But at that moment, Toby-the-dog hurled himself against the kitchen door with such force that it burst open.

Jack and the Christmas Pig pelted back down the hall, Toby-the-dog slipping and sliding on the wooden floorboards behind them. He chased them into the dark sitting room, so Jack and the pig dived under the sofa.

Toby-the-dog's shiny black nose appeared at the gap at the bottom, trying to snuffle them out. He whined loudly. Jack was afraid Toby-the-dog wouldn't give up while he knew they were under there.

"If we crawl behind the tree," Jack whispered to the Christmas Pig, "we could sneak back out of the room while he thinks we're still under here, and go to the kitchen door after all."

The Christmas Pig nodded. Holding his belly to keep his beans quiet, he followed Jack toward the gap at the other end of the sofa, where the Christmas tree stood. Its fairy lights were the only light in the room. Jack was now so small that the parcels beneath the tree loomed up in the darkness like higgledy-piggledy houses.

Toby-the-dog was still snuffling and pawing at the other end of the sofa. Slowly and cautiously, Jack crawled out and began to climb the presents. One of them was wrapped in scarlet ribbon, which was wonderful, because it gave somewhere for his bare feet to grip, but another, which was covered in blue paper patterned with silver snowflakes, tore a

little as Jack grabbed it: a huge new box of LEGOs was inside, and Jack was sure that was from Dad. The twinkling lights above, which had seemed so tiny when he and Mum put them on the tree, now seemed huge and dazzled his eyes. Slowly he climbed toward the top of the mound of presents until he reached the biggest, which was wrapped in shiny gold paper. He'd be able to walk straight across this and then he'd be out from under the tree—but he slipped! The paper was so shiny Jack's feet slid on it, and unable to find anything to grab onto, he tumbled down a crevice, which was like a pitch-black ravine now that he was only eight inches tall. He tried to get out again, but he'd fallen between gigantic presents with smoothly wrapped sides.

“Where are you?” whispered the Christmas Pig, but a second later he, too, had slid down the slippery golden package and landed on top of Jack.

“Oh no!” said Jack, as they heard Toby-the-dog scampering toward the tree. “Why did you have to rattle?”

“Which way to the kitchen?” cried the Christmas Pig, as Toby-the-dog's growls grew ever louder.

“I don't know!” said Jack desperately. “I'm lost!”



Part Two

MISLAID



BENEATH THE TREE

With the word “lost,” everything beneath Jack’s feet vanished. He was falling—or rather, slowly sinking—down through the place where the floor should have been. It was as though he was trapped in some thick substance he couldn’t feel or see. The tree lights had disappeared: all was inky blackness.

“Christmas Pig?” Jack called in panic.

“I’m here,” came the Christmas Pig’s voice out of the darkness. “Don’t worry! This is how you enter the Land of the Lost! It’ll be light in a moment!”

Sure enough, within a few seconds, Jack was able to see the Christmas Pig again. Like Jack, he was floating downward. Their surroundings became gradually lighter until Jack realized they were both sinking through their own column of golden light. Above them were two round holes in a wooden ceiling that Jack thought must be the floor of the world they'd left—*his* world, where Mum lived, where everything he knew existed.

Down, down, down they sank, and now Jack noticed that he and the Christmas Pig were far from the only Things sinking slowly through their columns of light. There were thousands upon thousands of them. Weightless, Jack was able to twist and turn, and in every direction he saw more sinking Things.

Nearest to Jack were a teaspoon, a shiny red Christmas bauble, a dog whistle, a pair of false teeth, a hand puppet, a shiny coin, a long string of tinsel, a camera, a screwdriver, a plane ticket, some sunglasses, a single sock, a teddy bear, and a roll of wrapping paper patterned with reindeer.

“You wouldn’t think it was possible, would you?” the wrapping paper called to Jack. One of the reindeer on her surface was talking and blinking. “Third time she’s lost me this evening! I’ve rolled under the radiator . . . She’s panicking . . . Left the wrapping too late, as usual!”

The roll of paper had barely uttered these words when she reversed direction and began traveling up instead of down, toward the hole in the ceiling. As she rose out of sight, the wrapping paper shouted, “Yay, she’s found me! Good luck! Hope you’re back Up Top soon!”

Jack didn’t answer, because he was too astonished by everything that was happening around him and, especially, what he could see of the floor below. At first, he thought he was looking down at a carpet of many different colors, but as he sank farther, he realized the carpet was really millions of Things. Scared, he scanned the floor for the Loser, but having no idea what the Loser looked like, he couldn’t tell whether he was

there or not. The lower Jack sank, the louder the noise: the Things on the floor were chattering and clattering and clinking and rustling, until the sound was almost deafening.

As their surroundings became lighter still, Jack realized that he was inside a gigantic building, like a warehouse, with immensely high brick walls and many holes peppering the wooden ceiling. The Things that had reached the ground, the rubber balls and diaries, the paper clips and tape measures, the cameras, pens, and purses, were all jabbering away in their groups. Jack was so fascinated by everything he was seeing that his landing took him by surprise. His bare feet touched the warm wooden floor, and the Christmas Pig landed beside him, in a pathway between a mass of jangling keys and an army of rustling umbrellas.

“We’ll need a ticket,” said the Christmas Pig briskly. “Come on.”

The Christmas Pig led Jack off along the path between the keys on one side and the umbrellas on the other. They passed a knife, a skewer, and a long knitting needle. Jack could tell they were all important, because they each wore a peaked black hat with an “L” on it, which somehow stayed balanced on the tops of them even while they were hopping along. The Things in the hats were patrolling the edges of the path, making sure the others remained in their groups and keeping the walkway free for Things that had only just arrived.

“Those are the Loss Adjusters,” the Christmas Pig muttered to Jack. “I’ve heard about them from Things that have been here before. They’re the Loser’s servants. They enforce his laws in exchange for not being eaten.”

A pair of long diamond earrings now landed in front of Jack and the Christmas Pig. They were sparkling so brightly Jack had to squint to look at them.

“Who’s in charge here?” cried one of the earrings, in a grand voice.

“We’re very valuable!” shouted her twin. “We require assistance!”

“Calm down, ladies,” said a croaking tennis ball, bouncing up alongside Jack and the Christmas Pig. The ball looked as though it had been chewed by a dog, and was very smelly. “I’ve been through this a load of times before, I ’ave. It looks a mess, but they’re organized.”

The earrings seemed offended at being addressed by an object so filthy.

“I think we’re in the wrong place!” cried the first earring, glittering as she turned on the spot, looking for assistance.

“Where do the *precious* Things go?” cried her sister.

But nobody answered. To their right, the keys kept yelling up at the distant holes in the ceiling, saying things like, “I’m in your other coat, you idiot!” or “You’ve left me in the lock again!” The umbrellas seemed quieter and sadder. Jack heard an old black one say, “I expect it’s all over this time. He’s left me on the train. He’ll probably buy a new one . . .”

A tin opener in a black hat now approached, walking on metal legs. She had a small box around her neck and thin metal arms just below her handle.

“Tickets!” shouted the tin opener. “New arrivals, get your tickets here!”

“Let me do the talking,” the Christmas Pig told Jack, but before he could ask for a ticket, the diamond earrings pushed in front of him.

“We’re in the wrong place!” said the first earring.

“Where do *important* Things go?” asked the second.

“Jewelry’s over there, by the west wall,” said the tin opener, pointing. “But you need tickets first. Here—” She tore off two blue tickets from the little box hanging round her neck and gave one each to the earrings. “West wall,” she repeated, because the earrings hadn’t moved.

"I don't think you understand," said the first earring. "We're made of *real diamonds*."

"You can't put us in with a bunch of common plastic beads," said the second earring. "Surely there's a place for valuables?"

"Get along to your waiting area," snapped the tin opener. "Diamonds or plastic, it's all the same down here. We'll soon know how much you're worth Up There."

Clearly offended, the earrings wiggled off toward the west wall.

The Loss Adjuster gave the tennis ball a blue ticket, too.

"Dog toys are over there, between shoes and schoolbooks."

It bounced away. The tin opener then turned to Jack and the Christmas Pig.

"Have you just arrived, too?"

"Yes, we were lost together," said the Christmas Pig. "We fell out of our owner's pocket."

"Kids!" snorted the tin opener, tearing off two more blue tickets and handing them to Jack and the Christmas Pig. "They're responsible for half the Things down here, careless little brutes. When it's quiet, we can hear them crying from Up There. Ought to keep a tighter hold on Teddy if they don't want the Loser getting him, shouldn't they?"

"I suppose so," said the Christmas Pig.

"Nice workmanship," added the tin opener, looking at Jack. "Good detailing."

"Thank you," said Jack nervously.

"Children's toys are right over by the north wall," she added. You'll need a lift—it's too far to walk."

She gave a screeching whistle, and an old roller skate came zooming along the path toward them. It was the size of a golf cart compared to

Jack and the Christmas Pig. They clambered inside, both just tall enough to see over the top.

The roller skate trundled off toward the place where the toys were waiting, and Jack felt a lurch of excitement: any moment now, he'd be seeing DP again!



MISLAID

They sped past lost playing cards, babies' shoes, lip balms, and pencil cases, and all the while, thousands upon thousands more lost Things floated down through golden shafts of light from the holes above.

As they neared the middle of the warehouse, Jack saw an enormous clock with four faces, positioned on a tall pillar so that every Thing could see it from wherever they were standing in the enormous building. At least, Jack thought it was a clock, but then he realized it had only one hand and no numbers. The colors of the rainbow ran around the outside of the face, and the clock's single hand was about to move out of yellow into green.

"I thought the Land of the Lost was supposed to be frightening," Jack said to the Christmas Pig.

The huge warehouse was certainly noisy and confusing, but Jack wasn't scared.

"We haven't gotten outside yet," said the Christmas Pig.

"But we don't need to go outside," said Jack. "You heard the tin opener. DP will be beside the north wall, with all the other toys."

"He won't," said the Christmas Pig. "He's been lost too long. I heard all about this bit from the keys of the shop where I was bought. They'd been here a lot. This place is called Mislaid. It's where Things go when they aren't properly lost yet. A human might just have put a Thing down for a couple of minutes, and forgotten where they left it, for example. Things are allowed to stay in Mislaid for one hour, to give them a chance of being found before they have to move out into the Loser's domain."

"DP's outside, where the Loser is?" Jack said, his excitement vanishing in an instant.

"Yes," said the Christmas Pig. "But don't worry. As long as he's obeying the law, he should be safe."

"But my Matchbox car said the Loser makes the laws, and he cheats!"

"That's true, he does," said the Christmas Pig, "but DP's a clever and sensible pig. I'm sure he won't do anything silly."

"How do *you* know DP's clever and sensible?" said Jack.

"Because we're brothers," said the Christmas Pig.

"But you've never met him!"

"That doesn't matter. He's my brother, and I'm his. We're the same."

"You aren't the same at all," said Jack, in case the Christmas Pig was about to suggest they go home, and Jack keep him, instead.

“No,” said the Christmas Pig. “I forgot: there’s something about me that makes you want to pull off my head.”

“I told you I was sorry about that,” said Jack.

“No, you didn’t,” said the Christmas Pig.

“All right, well I *am* sorry about it,” said Jack.

After that, they didn’t talk for a bit. The roller skate carried them past a great field of library books, their pages swishing as they discussed how they’d been lost.

“I think I can see toys!” said Jack at last.

Ahead of them, crowded into a huge area the size of five football fields, were dolls, plastic dinosaurs, model cars, skipping ropes, yo-yos, game cards, jigsaw pieces, and dominos: every kind of toy imaginable. Even though the Christmas Pig had told him DP wouldn’t be there, Jack couldn’t help hoping to see DP’s wonky ears and button eyes, but there was no sign of him anywhere.

“What we need,” said the Christmas Pig, as their roller skate slowed down, “is to find a pair of toys ready to swap tickets with us.”

“Why?” asked Jack.

“Because then we’ll be allowed out into the Land of the Lost without waiting an hour,” explained the pig. “It should be easy. Everyone here wants to stay as long as they can, because the Loser can’t touch them in Mislaid.”

The roller skate came to a halt, they climbed out, and it scooted off again. Close by the place they were standing was a two-headed monster who was weeping into his hands. The monster was brown and lumpy, and a plastic princess in a pink dress and a tiara was comforting him.

“I can’t believe he hasn’t found me!” sobbed the monster. “And now I suppose he’s fast asleep, dreaming of the new toys he’ll get for Christmas, and I-I’ll be eaten by the Loser!”

"Come on now, chins up," said the princess. "There's still time for him to find you."

"Ask those two to swap tickets," the Christmas Pig whispered to Jack, "but don't tell them why. They'll think it very strange that we're keen to leave Mislaid. Go on—you look like another action figure, so they'll trust you."

"What reason should I give for swapping?" asked Jack nervously.

The Christmas Pig thought hard, wrinkling up his snout.

"Tell the princess you think she's very pretty," he suggested, "and you'd like to protect her from the Loser and you're willing to swap tickets to keep her safe a bit longer."

Jack turned red.

"I'm not saying that!"

"I'll do it, then," said the Christmas Pig impatiently. He tugged Jack's ticket out of his hand and strode toward the princess and the two-headed monster, the beans in his belly rattling as he walked. "Princess," Jack heard the Christmas Pig saying, "my friend has noticed your friend's distress. Being a gallant young action fig—"

At that moment, a jack-in-the-box burst open unexpectedly, which caused a lot of toys nearby to scream with fright. Jack was glad of this, because it meant he couldn't hear all the embarrassing things the Christmas Pig was telling the plastic princess. Soon, the Christmas Pig was walking back toward him holding two green tickets instead of blue. Over the Christmas Pig's shoulder, Jack saw the two-headed monster blowing him kisses. He felt his face burning and turned away.

"The princess said she didn't need protecting and was quite looking forward to an adventure," said the Christmas Pig, "but the monster made her swap with us. He wanted to kiss you, but I said you're too shy."

"Good," muttered Jack, taking his new ticket.

"We should be able to get out any moment now, with these tickets," said the Christmas Pig. "Aha!"

He pointed his trotter at the strange clock on the pillar. Its hand was moving from yellow to green. Now Jack realized that when the Timer's hand reached a new color, everybody who had a ticket of that shade had to leave Mislaid.

"Let's go," said the Christmas Pig, as a multitude of Things with green tickets began to move out of their enclosures and shuffle off toward the north wall. They all looked nervous.

The Christmas Pig squared his shoulders.

"This is where the real journey starts. Ready?"

"Ready," said Jack, nodding.



THE THREE DOORS

The thousands of green ticket holders formed untidy lines. There was much jostling and pushing. Many Things were still staring longingly up at the finding holes in the ceiling, hoping to be caught in a shaft of golden light and transported back up to the Land of the Living. Loss Adjusters in black hats pushed them onward with cruel laughs.

“Too late now—it’s time for Allocation!”

“What does that mean?” Jack muttered to the Christmas Pig.

“I’m not sure,” said the Christmas Pig, “but I think it must have to do with which part of the Land of the Lost we’re sent to.”

They joined a line behind a magnificent sapphire ring.

"Would you believe it," she was saying loudly to anybody who'd listen. "She took me off to wash her hands and *left me behind on the sink!*"

Jack looked anxiously toward the front of the line. At first, he couldn't see what lay there, but their line moved quickly and soon he realized that they were heading toward a long row of desks at which more Loss Adjusters sat, among them a mousetrap, a corkscrew, and a stapler. Beyond the desks were three gigantic doors: The first was made of plain wood, the kind you'd find on a barn or an outhouse. The second was made of shining steel, the sort you'd see on a safe or strong room. The last was made of shining gold and it was beautifully engraved with curling vines and flowers. Many of the Things in the lines were pointing at this third door with longing expressions.

One by one, the Things who'd reached the front of the lines were called forward to sit at one of the desks. The Loss Adjusters asked them questions, then, when the interview was over, the Loss Adjuster stamped their ticket and ordered them toward one of the doors.

"I'm worried," said the Christmas Pig suddenly.

"What about?" asked Jack.

"About how we're going to get you past the Loss Adjusters without them realizing you're human," said the Christmas Pig.

"The tin opener didn't realize," said Jack.

"But it wasn't her job to find out about you, or decide where you're sent next," said the Christmas Pig. "Quick, we need to come up with a story. What factory were you made in?"

"I . . . don't know," said Jack, trying but failing to think of a name that sounded like a factory's.

"Say the Dingledown Factory, Birmingham," said the Christmas Pig. "That was my factory and they made action figures as well as cuddly pigs. Now, what are you called?"

“Jack.”

“Action figures aren’t called Jack! We’ll say . . . we’ll say you’re Pajama Boy, with the power of sleep and dreams.”

“I don’t want to be Pajama Boy,” said Jack. “He sounds stupid.”

“Then say you’re called Jack and see what happens!” whispered the Christmas Pig fiercely as they moved ever closer to the front of the line. “Now, how were you lost?”

“I fell out of a boy’s pocket,” said Jack, copying what the Christmas Pig had said earlier to the tin opener.

“And where are you now?” asked the Christmas Pig.

“I’m here, talking to you,” said Jack.

The Christmas Pig covered his face with his trotters. “We’ll be lucky if we aren’t thrown straight to the Loser.” He removed his trotters again and said, “It’s your Alivened bit that’s been sucked down here into the Land of the Lost. You need to tell the Loss Adjuster where your plastic body is, see? Up in the Land of the Living!”

“This was your plan!” said Jack, frightened and a bit cross, because they were now close to the front of the line. “Tell me what I should say, quickly!”

But just then, an enormous commotion erupted behind them.



THE PRISONER

Two Loss Adjusters—a hole punch and a fork—were dragging a small and muddy Thing along between two lines, using the strong and spindly arms that so many Things seemed to grow in the Land of the Lost. Their prisoner was so filthy that it was almost impossible to see what he really was, although he seemed furry.

“Please!” the prisoner squeaked. “Please give me a ticket, let me stay for an hour! Oh, please, please, give me a chance! Somebody might want me . . . Oh, let me try—”

As the Loss Adjusters drew level with Jack and the Christmas Pig, Jack saw what the sobbing prisoner was: a tiny blue cuddly bunny who looked as though he’d lain in mud for days if not weeks. Jack couldn’t

understand why the Loss Adjusters were being such bullies to the poor bunny. The fork was poking him to force him along faster, and every time the bunny squealed in pain, the hole punch laughed, opening and shutting so that little circles of paper flew from her like confetti. They dragged their prisoner straight past two of the Loss Adjusters' desks and headed toward what looked like a metal manhole cover in the floor, which Jack hadn't noticed before.

"You belong to the Loser, you do!" said the hole punch. "Now stop making a scene in front of all these decent Things what have got owners Up Top!"

"Why are they treating him like that?" Jack whispered to the Christmas Pig, who merely shook his head, looking stricken.

"Is it because he's dirty?" Jack asked, thinking of grubby old DP. What if DP had been treated like that when he'd arrived in Mislaid?

"Never mind the bunny," said the Christmas Pig, suddenly looking determined. "This is your chance, Jack. Crawl."

"What?" said Jack.

"Crawl past the Loss Adjusters, quickly, while everyone's watching the bunny. I'll meet you on the other side!"

Now Jack understood: everybody was transfixed by the prisoner and his captors, even the Loss Adjusters at the desks. Jack sank to his knees, crawled past the sapphire ring and through the gap between two desks, toward a group of Things that had already been Allocated, and were standing in front of the wooden door. These Things were far too interested in the fate of the prisoner to notice Jack had joined them. Standing up, he turned to watch what was happening to the bunny now.

"Please!" he was squealing. "Oh, please, give me a chance—"

"There are no chances for Things like you," growled the fork as the bunny struggled. "Nobody wants you. Nobody cares you're lost. You're

Surplus."

The hole punch dragged aside the heavy manhole cover, to reveal a dark hole. The bunny gave frightened squeaks as the fork prodded him closer and closer to the edge. At last, the little bunny slipped and fell. They heard his cry of terror growing fainter and fainter, as though he was sliding away down a chute, and then his scream was silenced by the hole punch slamming the metal lid back over the tunnel entrance.

The two Loss Adjusters straightened their black hats and hopped away, looking pleased with themselves. Slowly, all the Things who'd watched this horrible scene began to talk again.

A plastic comb standing beside Jack whispered, "Wasn't that dreadful?"

He had an odd appearance, having one eye on each side of him, and was speaking from a gap between his prongs.

"Yes," said Jack, "it was horrible."

He felt as though one of them should have tried to help the bunny instead of watching him get thrown down the chute. He wished he'd done something, but then he might have been recognized as a living boy and perhaps made to leave the Land of the Lost before he could find DP.

"It's disgusting, the way they treat Surplus," said a battery standing beside the comb, keeping her voice low in case a Loss Adjuster heard.

The Christmas Pig had now reached the front of the nearest line. The corkscrew Loss Adjuster, which had just sent the sapphire ring to wait beside the golden door, had a loud voice, so Jack was able to hear everything that passed between him and the pig.

"Name?" asked the corkscrew.

"The Christmas Pig."

"Where were you made?"